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## JEROBOAM AND THE DISRUPTION.

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*Progress of the Hebrew state suddenly arrested by the Disruption.—The division explicable in the light of ancient conditions.—Solomon, unlike David, alienated the Northern tribes by his policy.—Disruption favored by the prophets.—Their grounds.—Its consummation.—Its political and social effects upon the religious life and thought of the Hebrews.*

The prestige of the name of David and his rare diplomatic skill had at last united the independent Hebrew clans, the military prowess of the king and of the men who gathered about him had completed the conquest of the neighboring nations, and a strong military organization had welded them all into a mighty empire. Solomon completed the work of his father by organizing the state internally, by building strong fortresses throughout the kingdom at strategic points, and by transforming the city of David into a magnificent capital, filled with palaces and defended by fortifications. The Hebrew nation was just entering upon a brilliant epoch of prosperity and culture-development and commanding influence, when, lo! the empire is suddenly disrupted, and the two kingdoms thus formed, mutually weakened, fall an easy prey a few centuries later to foreign conquerors. What were the causes of this fateful act of disruption, so weighted with far-reaching consequences?

A casual reader of Old Testament history might at once reply that it was due to the unwise course followed by Solomon's successor in his treatment of the Northern tribes. This, however, would present only the immediate cause—the spark which set off the accumulated mass of tinder. Traces of the real causes appear far back in the early annals of Hebrew history. As the fragmentary records of the Book of Judges at times turn the flash-light upon the Hebrew tribes contending for the posses-

sion of the soil of Canaan, or absorbing and assimilating the original inhabitants of the land, we find the Israelites, in the north and center, and the Judeans in the south, each fighting its own battle alone, and each grappling with its own individual problems. Gideon's kingdom does not appear to have extended farther south than the limits of Ephraim. The wars and the events recorded in the Book of Judges are chiefly those of the Northern tribes. Nowhere is there any indication (in the light of the oldest sources) that they were ever united, not even temporarily, to ward off the attack of a threatening enemy. Furthermore, a strong line of Canaanitish cities, of which Jebus was the chief, extended across the land of Canaan from east to west completely cutting off the Israelites of the north from their kinsmen of the south.

The Judeans also absorbed an unusually large Canaanitish element (including the Kenites and Calebites). This fact undoubtedly tended to neutralize the mutual attraction of common blood and religion. Thus the influence of the tendency to separate, which characterizes all Semitic tribes, was fostered by circumstances and the development of their early history.

Under the stress of a common and threatening danger (subjection to the Philistine yoke), all the tribes were driven for a brief period to unite about the standard of the Benjaminite Saul, and later to accept him as their king. If the support of the Judeans was at first strong and hearty, it began, however, to wane when their kinsman and favorite champion, David, was hunted from the court of the suspicious Saul. Although they did not openly revolt, yet the readiness with which they proceeded, after the battle of Gilboa, to elect their favorite to the throne of Judah, even though the Northern tribes remained faithful to the house of Saul, shows conclusively that their support of the Benjaminite king was far from enthusiastic. In fact, it cannot be proved that they were represented at the battle of Gilboa.

Throughout all early Hebrew history the Northern tribes, of which Ephraim and Manasseh were the acknowledged leaders, played the most important rôle and far surpassed Judah in influence and resources. Cropping out also even at this early period

appears that intense rivalry which later came so prominently to the front.

But the scion of the house of Saul, whom the Northern Israelites placed upon the throne, proved a weak reed to lean upon; while from without the victorious Philistines pressed them severely. Thus the might of the tribes of the North was terribly broken, and threatened to be completely crushed. At last the stroke of assassins cut down in quick succession both their trusted leader, Abner, and their king.

Meantime David had firmly established himself upon the throne of Judah. During the troublesome days which followed the death of Saul, and through the years of civil war, he had succeeded, with marvelous tact, in not alienating the Northern tribes. Now, even though he belonged to the rival tribe of Judah, the Northern Israelites turned to him as the only one who could deliver them from complete subjection under the hated Philistine yoke. In this they were not disappointed. Thus at last, for the first time in their history, the tribes were really united. On the one hand the pressure of impending danger, and on the other the presence of such a leader as David, supreme in military prowess and diplomatic skill, were the necessary elements which made the amalgamation possible. Continued success in war, and a policy which favored the Northern tribes even more than Judah, preserved the union. But even during the reign of David the ancient, fierce rivalry broke forth and threatened to sunder the state. This occurred immediately after the rebellion of Absalom had been quelled by the death of its leader. In his efforts to conciliate the Northern tribes, David unwittingly stirred up the jealousy of the Judeans. Evidently while endeavoring to appease them, he in turn incensed their old rivals of the North; for we find them in a mad revolt, which is only put down by Joab by force of arms. Thus the old bitter feeling of rivalry survived, and all the skill and power of a David was required to keep together the elements which mingled so illy.

Solomon, at the beginning of his reign, took good care to remove by the sword all persons who might prove seditious.

Perhaps he felt too secure after this act, since his later policy is famous for just those mistakes which his father had so carefully avoided. Certainly his wisdom did not enable him to make of his reign anything but a glittering failure. The cause of this is probably to be found in the aim which actuated him. In many ways he was the Louis XIV of Israel. The state was for the king, not the king for the state. In this he was only imitating the policy of the Oriental potentates of his day. Both his home and foreign policy was developed with the end in view of making his kingdom, and especially his capital, equal in magnificence those of the monarchs about him. Love of show and luxury were the ruling principles in his life. His end he attained. Later generations always looked back upon the reign of Solomon as the golden era of Israel's history. His contemporaries in other lands viewed it with undisguised admiration. But this success was purchased at a terrible cost. For a time, to be sure, his people were dazzled by the display. This was most natural, for a century before they were only rude nomads, just beginning to contend for the soil, and within the memory of some of them they had been ground down under the heel of the conqueror. But ere long the Northern tribes waked up to the bitter realization of the fact that all this glitter was not gold for them, and that the just policy of David no longer guided the throne. Northern Israelitish interests were made subservient to those of the king and of Judah. It was gall and bitterness to the Northerner to see the wealth and power of the kingdom constantly being concentrated in Jerusalem, which lay far south of the center of the kingdom. Further, the temple and all the splendid palaces and strong fortifications which beautified the capital were not built by the jinns at the command of Solomon, as later traditions would have it, but by the fruit of the increase and by the wearisome toil of his subjects. His wisdom was chiefly exercised in organizing the nation so as to secure for himself the greatest income. Israel was divided into twelve districts, over which were placed royal governors whose chief functions were to collect the royal revenues. These were rendered in the form of produce, which went to supply the huge court of Solo-

mon. In addition a great levy was raised, whereby the king was enabled to enlist in his enormous building enterprises, not only the despised Canaanites, but practically all of his able-bodied subjects. To thus reduce to serfdom a people, who a generation before had been free and independent, meant bitter rebellion. It is also most significant that the Judeans do not appear to have been included in this levy. Thus the policy of David was completely reversed. On *a priori* grounds we would have been safe in concluding that the Northern Israelites broke out into rebellion against these acts of tyranny so unprecedented in Hebrew annals. Many may have been the uprisings. History records but one. The leader of this was Jeroboam, one of the tribe of Ephraim, which had always stood as the recognized head of the Northern clans and the ancient rival of Judah. Apparently of humble origin, he had risen by virtue of his personal ability until he was appointed by Solomon as director of the levy of his tribe, who were occupied upon the fortification of Millo at Jerusalem. The insurrection was quelled, but Jeroboam escaped and took refuge in Egypt, where he appears to have been favorably received by Shishak, the head of the new dynasty which had just arisen and which did not recognize the alliance with Solomon which had been made by the Pharaoh of the former line.

In connection with the account of the rebellion of Jeroboam there is a suggestive notice (1 Kgs. 11: 29-39) to the effect that Jeroboam was informed by a prophet, Ahijah, previous to his rebellion, that he would become king over the ten tribes. Even though the narrative be late, it is of value as indicating the attitude of the prophets toward the policy and reign of Solomon. This is further confirmed by the reference in 1 Kgs. 12: 22-24 to the action of a certain man of God, named Shemaiah. When Rehoboam gathered together his forces to march against the Northern Israelites to reduce them to subjection to the house of David, this man of God appears before the king and proclaims that it is the will of Jehovah that they shall not go up and fight against their brethren. The narrative also adds that the Judeans listened to this message and desisted from their expedition.

These references are sufficient to indicate that the influence of at least the more zealous Jehovah-prophets was thrown on the side of the Northern Israelites, and that they favored rather than opposed the Disruption. Later prophets seem to regard it as a necessity. Hosea is the first to suggest that it was a mistake and displeasing to Jehovah. A careful study, on the one hand, of the reign of Solomon and of the tendencies which were then beginning to manifest themselves, and, on the other, of the character of these early men of God, reveals the cause of their attitude. Solomon's policy brought to the Hebrew nation the refining influences and the products of the civilization of that ancient world. Viewed from the political and social standpoint this represented a most desirable advance. Israel, which heretofore had been only a loose confederacy of rude, half-civilized tribes, had suddenly taken its place side by side with the other influential, cultured nations of that old Semitic world. Through the channels of conquest and commerce and alliance it was fast absorbing the art, culture and ideas of the surrounding peoples. In a generation or two more it would have been quite impossible to have distinguished it from its neighbors. If its character and mission was to be similar to that of the other nations of the world, all this certainly represented great progress. But if it had a mission, and that mission could be performed only as it preserved a unique individuality, this was not an altogether profitable line of development. Especially was this true as respects the religious evolution of the nation, for with foreign art and customs came foreign religions. According to the fundamental principles of a Semitic alliance, Solomon was obliged at least to acknowledge the gods of the allied peoples. Hence the crisis was more than a political one. It was also religious. The future of the faith of humanity hung in the balances. It was Solomon's policy of Orientalism *versus* the pure worship of Jehovah.

Probably the prophets did not fully appreciate the stupendous issues at stake, but they saw enough to lead them to act. Perhaps much of their opposition to the civilization of their time was unreasonable. They may with some degree of reason be termed zealots. They were the avowed champions of the ancient

and more spiritual worship of Jehovah, which had been most clearly enunciated by Moses; and hence they were the unpromising opponents of anything which threatened to supplant or rival this. Thus we see why they were ready to welcome the disunion of the tribes as the last resort if thereby they might avert the awful danger which threatened the faith which they held dearer than the unity of their nation. Hence, before Rehoboam mounted the throne of his father, the deliberate purpose of the prophets, together with the ancient jealousy of the tribes, fomented by the injustice and grinding oppression of the policy of Solomon, had prepared the way for the subsequent act of Disruption.

A king with the commanding prestige and tact of David might have averted the catastrophe for a time. But Rehoboam, reared in the luxurious Oriental court of Solomon, possessed neither of these qualities.

The laws which determined the right of succession in Israel had evidently not as yet been definitely established. Saul and David had been duly chosen by the nation. Solomon had been nominated as his successor by the aged David and this had been ratified by the people. Thus it appears that the latter had always had an important voice in the election of their king. The Northern tribes, discontented with the heavy burdens and unjust partiality of Solomon's rule, refused to accept his son as their king until they were given certain assurances that these evils would be abated. Accordingly they meet at the old Northern capital, Shechem, whither Rehoboam goes to confer with them. The demands which they make are reasonable. It is probable that if the king had acceded to them the Disruption might even then have been averted. Ostensibly he acknowledges their justice, for he half yields in asking for three days in which to consider them. Graphically the author of Kings presents the counsels of the different factions in Rehoboam's camp. The grey-bearded courtiers, who had grown old in the service of his politic, worldly-wise father, appreciate the situation and urge a conciliatory policy—at least, until the present crisis is past. But the younger men, who like himself had grown up in the vitiated



court of Solomon, had only absorbed its Orientalism. Naturally he accepts their advice since they merely voice his feelings. Despotism shall win or lose the day. Therefore, at the end of the three days, when the representatives of the Northern tribes again assemble, confidently expecting a generous Magna Charta, a bomb is exploded in their midst. "Whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions" are the unmistakable words of the king. It instantly kindles into a fierce blaze all the suppressed jealousy and discontent which filled their hearts. The cry, "What portion have we in David? To your tents, O Israel," spreads like wild-fire from mouth to mouth throughout the assembly. The aged Adoram, who was at the head of the hated levy, is sent to treat with the Northern Israelites and is ruthlessly slain by them. It is forever too late for conciliation. The die is cast. Before Rehoboam has reached Jerusalem, whither he has fled for his life, king of but one tribe, Jeroboam, who in the earlier days had led the revolt against the tyranny of Solomon, and had now returned from his forced exile in Egypt, had been raised to the throne of Israel. The Judeans, who naturally refused to accept the choice of the majority of the tribes, they deem rebels.

In the division, the greater portion of the accumulated wealth and military resources of the preceding reigns fell into the hands of the Judeans. At first Rehoboam endeavored to win back by force of arms the kingdom of his father. But the invasion of the Egyptian king, Shishak, soon completely shattered his power, and ere long we find Judah obliged to assume the defensive against Northern Israel, to which fell the lion's share of the territory and natural resources of the old empire. Thus the ancient breach, again reopened, constantly widened until union was impossible.

The act of Disruption turned the future course of Hebrew history into entirely new channels. Its effects can be clearly traced in all the varying fortunes which subsequently came to the Jewish people. These may be briefly epitomized and classified as:

(1) *Political effects of the Disruption.* It is idle to conjecture what might have been had the integrity of the empire been preserved. But it is certain that the Disruption sapped the political strength of the Hebrew people so that their subsequent history is one of more or less steady decline. During the earlier days, war between the two kingdoms so far weakened both that the Syrians on the northeast were able, not only to attain independence, but also to build up a powerful state which proved an untiring enemy to Northern Israel. Throughout most of its history these protracted Syrian wars exhausted its strength, and at times reduced it to the direst extremities. Even the petty states about, like Moab and Edom, frequently made bold to revolt against Hebrew suzerainty. The civil history of Northern Israel is one of anarchy and bloodshed. The reigning family is frequently cut down, root and branch, by some military upstart who thus establishes his family on the throne, where they remain until they in turn share the same fate. Disintegration from within and attack from without followed in the train of the Disruption until in 722 B.C. the name of Northern Israel was forever erased from the rôle of nations.

During the century immediately following the separation, protected by its seclusion and insignificance, Judah enjoyed comparative quiet. But with the fall of Samaria it was projected into the direct current of the world's history. From this time on it figures chiefly as a vassal state, the bone of contention between the great world-powers. In 586 B.C. it is blotted out of existence by the Babylonians.

(2) *Social effects of the Disruption.* The mighty tide of foreign customs and civilization which came in during the reigns of David and Solomon was turned suddenly backward by the act of Disruption. Those elements which would attract this from without, the commanding influence and wealth of the old empire, had departed. The energies of the people were occupied in a death-struggle for national existence. Consequently for a few generations at least the social life tended to return to its primitive simplicity. The influence of Solomon's policy of exalting the court far above the mass of the nation was arrested, and

thereby greater equality among all classes was maintained, until, under such kings as Ahab of Israel, and Uzziah of Judah, the same old tendency toward Orientalism began to manifest itself. But even then, and throughout all the history of the kingdoms, the social development was moulded and confined within simpler lines by the influences which followed in the train of the Disruption.

(3) *Religious effects of the Disruption.* When Jeroboam found himself on the throne of Israel he was at once confronted by a problem: "What shall be the center of the religious life of the new kingdom?" His solution was doubtless considered by his contemporaries most clever and satisfactory. Instead of following the example of David and building a temple at his capital, which should be regarded as the national sanctuary, he chose two of the most ancient and venerable of the shrines of the land. At these places he set up two golden calves, the familiar symbols, in that age, of the power of Jehovah. Thus Dan and Bethel were designated by royal decree and provision as the chief sanctuaries of the nation. According to the narrative in Judges a descendant of the family of Levi had officiated at Dan from a very early day. For the further needs of the service at the shrines the king appointed other priests. In thus instituting the national worship, Jeroboam appears to have shocked none of the religious instincts of his day. Even the zealous prophets gave a silent assent to his act. The conservatives of the nation probably approved the return to the old sanctuaries. But, as it affected the cause of pure religion, it represented a sad retrogression, for it meant a return to the ancient cult of the land. Later prophets, like Hosea, clearly recognized the brood of evils which followed in its train, and point back to this act of Jeroboam as the cause of the subsequent apostasy and immorality which proved the undoing of Northern Israel.

The religious history of Judah during the first century is little more than a reflection of that of Northern Israel. The same waves of heathenism swept over both kingdoms. But the Disruption tended to focus the religious as well as the political life of Southern Israel more and more in Jerusalem, and thus pre-

pared the way for that centralization which became in the time of Josiah the most efficient check upon the tendency to retain certain elements of, and even revert to the ancient, Canaanitish cult. Judah also was much more secluded and protected by natural barriers from the influence of foreign invasion and civilization, than her Northern sister. Consequently, by virtue of her independence, in this little corner of the earth, it was possible for a national religious life and faith to take root, which survived and continued to unfold long after the fall of the Northern kingdom.

Looking broadly at Hebrew history, we can see that the earlier prophets did not make a mistake and that the evils of Solomon's reign and the jealousy of the tribes were made to fit into God's great plan of truth and beauty. In view of the weakness of Egypt and the inactivity of Assyria during the century following the death of Solomon, it is more than possible that, if the old empire had retained its integrity, it might have become a mighty world-power. But such political success would never have made the Hebrew nation a people with a peculiar mission to the world. It was only in the furnace of affliction that those perverse, insignificant Canaanitish tribes were prepared for the reception of their commission. Approaching captivity led their prophets to open wider their spiritual eyes until they beheld, instead of a local god of one little nation, a Lord supreme in the affairs of men and in the universe. Out of the depths of their private and national woe, those divinely enlightened men caught glimpses of the character of the Eternal and of His purposes which enabled them to rise above national annihilation and exile, and to give to their nation and the world hopes and truths and principles which are the eternal foundations of religious faith. Thus, while by the Disruption the Hebrew nation lost its life, in a truer and higher sense it found it, and was prepared in turn to transmit this life and hope to humanity.